

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 000741

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/20/2015

TAGS: PREL PTER FAID PGOV CE NO LTTE

SUBJECT: NORWEGIAN FACILITATOR SOLHEIM THINKS JOINT RELIEF MECHANISM IS IMMINENT, SEEKS LATE MAY CO-CHAIRS MEETING

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD FOR REASON 1.4 (D).

¶11. (C) Summary. Solheim is optimistic that a joint GSL/LTTE/Muslim mechanism for tsunami relief in the north and east will be signed soon but quite emphatic that, absent the mechanism, there will be no progress on peace for a long time. How the mechanism, if signed, would play out on the ground and how it would be linked to the mid-May Development Forum in Kandy remain vague. Colombo co-chairs representatives agreed a mechanism signing should be followed by a supportive co-chair statement. Solheim and A/S Rocca agreed to pursue the possibility of a late May/early June co-chairs meeting in Washington. End Summary

¶12. (C) Norwegian peace facilitator Eric Solheim reviewed the status of his efforts with Colombo co-chair representatives (DCM represented the U.S.) over dinner at Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar's residence April 19. Solheim and Brattskar also met with visiting A/S for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca April 20. Key points from the two meetings follow.

Making the Rounds

¶13. (C) Solheim met with the GSL Peace Secretariat, FM Kadirgamar, PM Rajapakse, Opposition leader Wickremesinghe, Muslim leaders Rauff Hakeem and Ferial Ashraff, as well as senior police and military leaders. He will not meet with President Kumaratunga since she has postponed her return to Sri Lanka until April 26 or 27. On the LTTE side, Solheim and Brattskar met political chief Thamilchelvan at Colombo airport April 20 upon his return from the LTTE jaunt to Europe and South Africa. They also met LTTE officials in the east, including eastern military commander Bhanu, during an April 19 trip to the Batticaloa area. Solheim did not go to Kilinochchi this time.

Agreement on Interim Mechanism Imminent (Maybe)

¶14. (C) Solheim said the GSL and the LTTE are very close to agreement on a joint tsunami relief mechanism. The remaining stumbling block is the "off shore provision" and even on that the "differences are very small." "It will be unbelievable if they don't agree," Solheim concluded. Solheim confirmed press reports, however, that the GSL almost certainly will not agree to a signing until after May 1 to avoid giving their JVP coalition "partner" a football to kick around during May Day celebrations. Solheim said he had noted with interest that Foreign Minister Kadirgamar had been more "mechanism friendly" of late.

¶15. (C) (Note: In a separate April 19 discussion with A/S Rocca and the Ambassador, GSL Peace Secretariat head Jayantha Dhanapala confided that a mutually satisfactory, feasible agreement on the joint mechanism had been reached at the working level. It is now up to President Kumaratunga to make "the political decision" to sell it to others--including her coalition partner. He indicated that he was not entirely sure that she had made that decision yet, but suggested that the President's political savvy will likely guide her in the right direction. A joint mechanism is not needed to facilitate relief efforts at the working level, Dhanapala said; the GSL and LTTE are already cooperating at the local level. The real value of the joint mechanism would be political. The two sides have "painted ourselves into corners," he acknowledged; the joint mechanism provides a fresh opportunity, outside the boundaries of the politically-charged ISGA controversy, for dialogue and confidence building. The LTTE wants the joint mechanism for two reasons, Dhanapala said: money (e.g., increased access to aid) and legitimacy. End Note)

¶16. (C) On the LTTE side, Solheim said he and assistant Lisa Golden (also present at both Colombo meetings) had presented Thamilchelvan with some new ideas on the mechanism in a Dublin meeting (after his return to Europe from South Africa) last week. Solheim and Brattskar reinforced this effort in their April 20 "very brief" airport chat with Thamilchelvan. Moreover, Norwegian FM Peterson had called both Thamilchelvan and London-based

LTTE luminary Balasingham April 18 to urge that the LTTE not drag its heels on the mechanism. Solheim said he was confident that, as a result of these Norwegian efforts, both Balasingham and Thamilchelvan would push LTTE leader Prabhakaran to sign. "We hope to have further news from the LTTE in a few days," Solheim commented.

17. (C) Solheim reiterated that there is agreement on almost all of the "slightly less than eight page" document. Solheim noted (and co-chairs representatives, especially Dutch ambassador Blankhart, agreed) that ideally the mechanism should ideally be signed well before the May 16-17 Development Forum in Kandy. Brattskar joked that he would make sure it was signed on May 2. Solheim said the implications of the LTTE signing the mechanism were very significant since it would be the first time the group had "committed to something at the national level" and they would be conceding that "the center must be worked with." Brattskar emphasized that the mechanism would be positive for Muslims, since they would participate as a separate entity rather than being represented by the GSL as was the case in the peace talks.

18. (C) Solheim and the co-chair representatives then had a detailed exchange on exactly how a signed mechanism would be implemented and what it would mean on the ground. Solheim said the mechanism was needed if there is to be any tsunami relief in the north and east. Japanese Ambassador

SIPDIS

Suda demurred sharply, commenting that extensive relief is already being carried out. While the mechanism would help on that front, Suda stated, the Japanese view is that the main value of a signed joint mechanism would be as a way to maintain some semblance of an ongoing peace process. Solheim said he didn't disagree with the Japanese view but that the mechanism would help on the tsunami front, especially during the transition into reconstruction. In particular it would make life easier for GSL officials in the North and East, who are appointed by the GSL but in fact must clear everything they do with local LTTE representatives. "This will give them cover," Solheim said.

Next Steps/Co-Chair Statement on Joint Mechanism

19. (C) DCM asked what the first steps in the field would be when/if the mechanism is signed. Solheim said "joint bodies" would have to be set up (GSL, LTTE, Muslims) at the local level with a central policy organ in Colombo. Solheim said the LTTE was "smart enough" not to appoint "hard liners" or military figures to these bodies and might appoint Tamils who were not LTTE members. According to the terms of the mechanism, "international observers" would be present at every level to make sure the mechanism was working, although Solheim admitted that details on the international observer issue (and many other provisions) were purposely left vague to increase the chances of agreement. Blankhart opined that perhaps the co-chairs should take the lead on the "international observer" question. Others said it should be a broader donor effort. No conclusions were reached. Co-chair representatives agreed that there probably should be either a joint co-chair statement or individual statements from co-chairs once the mechanism is signed. Any statement(s) should congratulate both sides but also lay down a marker that implementation would be followed closely.

Donor Forum

10. (C) Co-chair conversation then turned to the relationship between the joint mechanism process and the mid-May Donor Forum in Kandy, with it quickly becoming clear that questions outnumbered answers. Assuming the mechanism is signed beforehand, should the GSL officially present it at the forum? Should the other two mechanism partners (LTTE and Muslims) be present at the Kandy event? If not, should there be a separate meeting with them before or after the forum? Co-chairs agreed that further discussion on these issues was necessary. DCM noted that the U.S. would have to carefully examine potential participation in any meetings that might include the LTTE, in either the context of the development forum or implementation of the joint mechanism.

Beyond the Mechanism

11. (C) Asked for his perspective on the broader peace process, beyond the immediate effort to get both sides to ink the joint mechanism, Solheim said he was pessimistic. "There is no chance of a return to the table unless there

is a change in government, either as the result of an election or as the result of President Kumaratunga feeling stronger in her political position," the Norwegian stated. Therefore, he continued, the focus must be on "securing the peace process" until this happens. "It is important that the peace boat keeps floating." Brattnskar observed that, absent the joint mechanism or other significant developments, it will be very difficult to keep the peace process "limping along" under the end of the President's tenure at the end of 2006. A/S Rocca, the Ambassador and Solheim all agreed that if President Kumaratunga were to announce a bold initiative to move the peace process forward, most of the Sinhalese polity would follow her. But, beyond periodic speeches, she seems uninterested in or oblivious to the need to do so.

¶12. (C) Solheim told A/S Rocca and the co-chair representatives that he was trying to implement a "track two" of "significant personalities" from both sides that would meet periodically to discuss broader issues, a "talk fest" that would at least keep some sort of discussion going while the leadership on both sides "wandered back" to the table. FM Kadirgamar and LTTE political chief Thamilchelvan both are enthusiastic. Solheim asked that this possible initiative be kept strictly confidential for the moment.

¶13. (C) Solheim said it is essential that both sides avoid provocative acts that would lead to retaliation and a cycle of violence. He had told the LTTE that killings must stop. He also planned to tell the GSL that support for the Karuna faction also must stop. Solheim said the recent "discovery" of a Karuna camp near a GSL army camp left "no doubt" that such support was taking place (in obvious contradiction of President Kumaratunga's repeated assurances to him on previous visits that such support had not and would not occur). Brattnskar commented that some in the Peace Secretariat were taking the "lawyerly" position that such support to Karuna did not violate the cease-fire agreement, completely missing the broader political and peace process implications of such support.

¶14. (C) On the brighter side, Solheim said it is clear that neither the GSL nor the LTTE wants to return to the battlefield. He noted that there have been plenty of "excuses for fighting," like the recent LTTE firing on a GSL naval vessel but it is encouraging that both sides are bending over backwards to prevent such incidents from setting off "something much bigger."

Co-Chairs Meeting

¶15. (C) During dinner with Solheim, Colombo co-chairs representatives agreed that a "capitals" co-chair meeting would be useful not too long after the mid-May Development Forum (assuming that the joint mechanism is signed) and that this should be passed back to capitals. Suda said he would discuss this with Japanese envoy Akashi (who, according to Suda, might visit Sri Lanka in the first half of May but would not stay for the Development Forum). Solheim said he thought it might be useful for the next co-chairs meeting to be in Washington and that this idea was behind FM Peterson's recent discussions with the Deputy Secretary in Oslo and recent efforts by the Norwegian

SIPDIS
ambassador in Washington to seek a meeting with
UnderSecretary Burns.

¶16. (C) Following up on co-chairs meeting scenarios April 20, Solheim and A/S Rocca agreed to pursue a late May/early June meeting in Washington. Both agreed that a co-chairs meeting in that timeframe would send a useful message in the wake of a joint mechanism signing (or be an opportunity for essential coordination on the future of the peace process if the mechanism is not signed). A/S Rocca undertook to look at dates and then get in touch with the other co-chairs once she was back in Washington early next week.

Comment

¶17. (C) There seem to be grounds for cautious optimism that the joint tsunami relief mechanism for the north and the east will be signed in early May. The primary benefit would be to the ailing peace process rather than a marked improvement in tsunami coordination. Solheim and Brattnskar are quite eloquent, however, that if the parties do not find the political courage to sign, it will make progress on the peace process even less likely than it is now and that the co-chairs need to be thinking about that scenario.
End Comment

¶18. (U) A/S Rocca cleared this cable.

